Week 4: Girish Karnad

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Lecture 11: *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*

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- The play is about how history is written and what counts as official history. The play frames the life and dreams of Tipu Sultan with the conversation between Colin Mackenzie, a colonial scholar and the court historian Hussain Ali Kirmani.
- While Mackenzie wants to produce an objective history of Tipu Sultan that is devoid of emotion, the court historian Kirmani was close to the sultan and uses his personal memories to write his history of the sultan's life for the British who betrayed him. For him, the book of dreams was personal and sacred but for Mackenzie it is just another 'native' 'authentic' source to analyze the sultan as a strategic ruler.
- The Sultan's dreams are literary and religious allusions to his absolute power and victory over the British and of his father Haider Ali who berates him for sending his sons as hostages to Lord Cornwallis. His power was a function of his ability to seek and sustain alliances with the French, who were known for their superior military warfare, the Ottoman Empire, China and so on.
- Even though his official histories portray him as an intolerant Islamic ruler who imposed Islam as the official religion of his kingdom, there are many accounts of his life that suggest he was an ambiguous figure. On the one hand, he was known for his generous grants given to various Hindu religious institutions, especially the Sringeri Mutt, land grants to Brahmins, and for protecting religious minorities in his kingdom. But on the other hand, he may have used Islam to forcibly convert those who resisted his power. He also lifted the

jiziya tax from non-Muslims and had people like Poornaiya, his Hindu prime minister as his trusted aide.

- Tipu Sultan anticipates the might and threat that the British pose to the various Indian princely states and he realizes that the British want to divide them to impose their supreme rule. He is unable to settle the territorial differences between his own kingdom and the neighboring ones, the Maratha Empire, whose southern extremities had been conquered and seized by Hyder Ali and the Nizam's state of Hyderabad. They are thus unwilling to join forces against the British who exploit these strategic and economic differences between Tipu Sultan and his neighbours.

- Unlike his father who was more keen to modernize their warfare technology and centralize sovereign authority, Tipu Sultan gave equal importance to trade and commerce. Tipu Sultan admires the unity and spirit of the young British soldiers and claims to have learnt how to fight wars from the British. He realizes the basis for the power of European colonial of sovereignty, especially the British, had to do with their firm control of trade and commerce. Tipu imports silkworms and eggs from China to found his own silk industry. He is abreast with the recent technological innovations in Europe and wishes to train his own artisans and workers to draw from European technology. He also realizes the significance of the sea for trade routes and military reinforcements, which is why he seeks to extends his kingdom to Kodagu and Malabar.

- Tipu Sultan is finally betrayed by his own officers who are bribed to enable the entry of Cornwallis and his forces with the support of the Marathas. Tipu's attempt to seek Napolean's support in the war fails and finally Tipu has no choice but to offer his sons as hostages until he fulfills the conditions of the treaty between him and Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India, which includes returning the territory that belongs to the Marathas and paying six crores of rupees as war indemnity. While the other princely states are richly rewarded when India gains independence, the Wodeyars are reinstated by the British in Mysore while Tipu Sultan's descendants are exiled to Calcutta where they lead impoverished lives.

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Lecture 12: *The Fire and the Rain*

- *The Fire and the Rain* is a modern adaptation of the story of Yavakri from the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. In the Mahabharata, Yavakri, the son of the sage Bharadwaja acquires knowledge of the Vedas after years of penance and uses his knowledge to molest the daughter-in-law of the Sage Raibhya whom he resents. Raibhya creates a Brahma Rakshas, a demon and a spirit in the form of his daughter-in-law to kill Yavakri and after Yavakri's death, Bharadwaja curses Raibhya that he will die at the hands of his own son. Paravasu who mistakes his father who is wearing deer skin for a deer, fatally shoots him with an arrow. Paravasu falsely accuses Aravasu of patricide for which Aravasu has to perform penitentiary rites. Aravasu prays to the Sun God and when he is granted a boon, asks that Yavakri, Bharadwaja and Raibhya be brought back to life.

- In Karnad's adaptation of this tale, Yavakri and Vishakha, Raibhya's daughter-in-law, have an affair that begins before and continues after her marriage to Paravasu. Paravasu has abandoned her after a year of sexual gratification to preside over the fire sacrifice. In his absence, she meets Yavakri, who has not overcome his desires after years of penance, and their meeting rekindles their love and desire for each other.

- When Raibhya sends the Brahma Rakshas to kill Yavakri, Yavakri is initially unfazed as the magical water in his jug has the power to immobilize the demon. But Vishakha empties the jug desperate to save him and entreats him to rush to his father's hermitage, which is the only place where he will be safe from the Rakshas. But before he can enter the hermitage, he is intercepted by Andhaka, the blind shudra man who raised him but is ironically unable to recognize his footsteps. Yavakri is impaled by the Rakshas.

- Paravasu kills his father intentionally out of hatred and finally chooses death to expiate his patricide in the end when Aravasu destroys the sacrificial alter in a frenzy of revenge.

- There is the parallel story of the love between Aravasu and Nittilai, a tribal woman. Aravasu is on the verge of getting married to her and is willing to renounce his caste community for her love. But on the day of his marriage he gets late as he has to perform the funeral rites for Yavakri. Nittilai is married to a tribal man from her community.

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- Aravasu has to perform his father's funeral rites and do penance for his brother's act of killing their father. When Paravasu falsely accuses him of patricide, he is beaten up and exiled by the other Brahmins but he is rescued by Nittilai who chooses him over her husband.

- Although Aravasu seeks revenge, Nittilai prevents him from furthering violence. Arvasu acts in a play, for which he loses his caste purity that alludes to the fatal rivalries between Raibhya, Paravasu and Yavakri. Arvasu wears a mask and plays Vritra, Brahma's son with demoness. The Actor-Manager plays Indra and warns Arvasu that the mask could come to life and control him.

- In the inner play, Indra is jealous of Vishwarupa, who is Brahma's son with a mortal woman, for his virtuous and wise reputation. Vritra always accompanies Vishwarupa to protect from Indra's plans to kill him. But Indra tricks him and kills him while he is pouring oblations in the sacrificial fire. Paravasu reacts to the scene, as Arvasu desecrates the sacrificial area along with the tribals completely possessed by the demonic spirit of the mask.

- Nittilai manages to take the mask off but she is soon killed by her husband and brother who have been waiting for her to make an appearance.

- The Brahma Rakshas pleads to Arvasu asking him to request the gods to free him from the bondage of life and death, which Arvasu does, at the cost of sacrificing Nittilai and his happiness with her. Indra is pleased with the performance and tells him either Raibhya, Paravasu and Yavakri can be brought to life or Nittilai. Arvasu chooses the former, and Nittilai becomes a scapegoat for the redemption of the Brahmin community, and Vishakha is chastised for her transgression.

- While Brahmins are equated with ambition and greed for power, and violence, Shudras are equated with those who are kind and compassionate and form the basis for the collective community, perhaps free of caste.

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Lecture 13: *Broken Images*

- *Broken Images* takes the form of a monologue between Manjula and her virtual onscreen image. The play focuses on the politics of choosing to write and publish in English as opposed to regional vernaculars like Kannada.

- While Manjula is an established Kannada writer who teaches English in a college, her disabled sister Malini is an English writer, whose novel Manjula plagiarizes and publishes under her own name.

- Manjula openly confesses to the interrogations of the image, which is a symptom of her repressed unconscious, that she is not ashamed of writing and publishing in English, which has won her fame and money. There is a distinction between the image that reveals Manjula's unconscious desire for fame and power, the way Manjula presents herself as someone who is innocent and the transformation in our perception of her through the image's interrogations of Manjula.

- Manjula represents the insecurity of non-English language writers and readerships who are threatened by the growing power and popularity and wealth of English language books. Manjula remembers feeling neglected by her parents who focused all their attention on her sister who led a life of disability. She is also jealous and suspicious of Malini's intellectual relationship with her husband Pramod.

- The image finally declares it is Malini, and says Manjula was decimated the moment she read Malini's novel. The play is also about the mediated relationship between the author, the text and the reader. Manjula identifies herself with one the cousin's in the autobiographical novel, where she sees herself reflected as a shallow and petty woman. The text takes on the life of the author, and gains meaning through the figure of the reader, who is not a biographical figure but a signified just like the author, and is incorporated into the text. The relationship between languages, author and text is mediated by power.

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Lecture 14: Summary of Girish Karnad (Please refer to the Lecture Notes of Week 3 and Week 4)